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ABSTRACT

Rosow's social integration theory of aging suggests that the elderly are integrated into society through social values, formal and informal group membership, and social roles. To examine the nature and extent of social integration, three age-segregated communitites, a Florida mobile home community, a Florida condominium community, and a community of detached units in Arizona, were examined. In-depth interviews with residents and staff, participant observation, and document collection, revealed that each community was tightly integrated, with members in constant contact. Residents identified strongly with their communities in a psychological sense, sharing similar values of health, sociability and leisure rather than success or material possessions. Although the three communities varied in location, size and resident composition, age formed the basis of integration. Living among age peers reinforced a common set of values and interests shared by those in the same stage of the life cycle. (JAC)

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Social Integration In Planned Retirement Communities

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ABSTRACT

Irving Rosow presents his social integration theory of aging in Social Integration of the Aged and other scholarly papers written later. According to Rosow the elderly are integrated into society through: social values, formal and informal group memberships, and social roles. The most viable opportunities for integration of older people are among age peers. Age-segregated communities provide more opportunities for making friends among age peers and the development of more age-appropriate norms, roles, groups, and activities. Continuing the work of Rosow (1967) Bultena and Wood (1969) Sherman, et. al. (1968) and others the present study (funded by the National Institute of Mental Health) examines the nature and extent of social integration in three age-segregated communities: a mobile home community in Florida, a condominium in Florida, and a community of detached units in Arizona. After an intensive site selection process, three sites were chosen; and community studies were conducted at each. In-depth interviews with residents and staff, participant observation, and document collection at each site provides the rich data base from which to assess the importance of formal and informal social structures to social integration. Descriptive case studies reveal intrinsic and extrinsic factors which play a role in the development of social integration of residents of age-segregated communities. Although the communities studied differ on several dimensions, certain structures are important at each site; however, the nature of these general structures differ in each community. The role of social values in integrating residents at each site is also explored in the paper.

Social Integration In Planned Retirement Communities[1]

INTRODUCTION

Although the migration west of early American pioneers ended several years ago, today's old people are just beginning their move west to settle the new frontier. And as Fontana (1977) noted in his work titled, The Last Frontier: The Social Meaning of Growing Old, "just as the frontier tested the true mettle of the pioneers who dated venture into the unknown land, so the frontier of old age tests the people who cross it." (p. 182)

Age-segregated retirement communities in California, Arizona, and other states represent a "new frontier." Those older individuals who pull up stakes, leaving family and friends to settle these new communities represent modern day settlers forging a new lifestyle. Since their inception in the late 1950's, there has been phenomenal growth in the numbers of age-segregated retirement communities and in the number of elderly choosing to move into them. Today there are hundreds of such communities, concentrated primarily in the "sunbelt" states of Florida, California, and Arizona but also found in Texas, New Mexico, North and South Carolina, Hawaii and other states.

Since their inception age segregated retirement communities have been controversial. Maggie Kuhn has called them "playpens for the elderly" and Margaret Mead has referred to them as "golden ghettos." Lewis Mumford (1956), one of the leading critics of age-segregation, and others claim that older people need contact with different age groups to remain actively engaged in life. Mumford further condemns such

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communities on the basis that they are merely another way in which the larger society segregates oldsters, "pushing them aside" and eliminating them from the mainstream of society.

But empirical studies of life in age-segregated communities have revealed consistently higher levels of morale for residents of such communities (Hoyt, 1954; Sherman, et. al., 1968; Bultena and Wood, 1969; Sequin, 1973; Sheley, 1974). Similarly, ethnographic studies of life in such communities have revealed that residents share in a mutual aid society, participate in a large variety of age-appropriate social roles, groups, and activities, and enjoy close-knit relationships in a subculture of shared pasts, values, interests, and futures (Johnson, 1971; Swartout, 1965; Ross, 1977; Hochschild, 1973).

SOCIAL INTEGRATION THEORY

How do we explain these findings? Drawing upon the classical theory of Emile Durkheim, Irving Rosow and others have proposed the social integration theory of aging to explain why living amongst one's age peers in age-segregated communities contributes to high morale of residents. Durkheim's primary concern demonstrated in the Division of Labor and Suicide is with the process of social organization, the ways in which individuals are bound together in social unity and the way these units maintain themselves over time. His concern with group cohesion, social solidarity, and integration are evident throughout his work. For Durkheim one of the major elements of integration is the extent to which various members of a society interact with one another. Related to the frequency of patterned interaction is a measure of value integration, "that is the sharing by the members of values and beliefs."

In collectivities where a high degree of value consensus exists, there is less behavioral deviance than in groups in which consensus is attenuated (Coser and Rosenberg, 1969: 187).

A close examination of Durkheim's concept of integration reveals that what he meant by integration has something to do with a person's social ties to the larger group, with his level of meaningful interaction with other members of the larger social group, with his degree of social "belongingness." As he stated it:

> A society, group, or social condition is said to be integrated to the degree that its members possess a 'common conscience' of shared beliefs and sentiments, interact with one another and have a sense of devotion to common goals. In a condition of weak integration, life derives no meaning and purpose from the group. (Durkheim, 1964, p. 83)

It is clear from his works that what Durkheim meant by integration referred to the ties that bind men to various social groups.

Durkheim stressed the importance of shared values and beliefs to social integration in all of his major works. The importance of social control and social order similarly is emphasized in his works. As Bidwell (1966) points out, Durkheim viewed values as the basis of social order. One of the major questions he addressed was: How can values serve to integrate complex social systems? (Bidwell, 1966: 117). Durkheim pointed out that "because of shared sentiments, men would be loyal to society, make the common interests their own, and accept as legitimate the norm of social complementarity" (Bidwell, 1966: 119). Durkheim viewed intermediary social groups, such as voluntary associations, as the transmitters of social values and as vehicles for generalizing common sentiments and loyalties. The importance of mediating groups is also emphasized in Mizruchi's(1964) writings.

The most elaborate statement of the integration theory of aging is stated in the work of Irving Rosow. Rosow's basic contention is that elderly individuals' integration into the society as a whole is seriously weakened in several respects: loss of former work role and economic resources accompanying it, loss of spouse and former friends who die, and informal age-grading which places a great distance between the generations. The solution for re-integration of the nation's elderly, in Rosow's opinion, lies in age-segregated communities where elderly individuals find a ready source of friends in age peers as well as meaningful leisure roles and roles in various organizations. Rosow popularized the notion of "concomittant socialization" when he indicated that the most viable opportunities for the integration of older people is through informal groups among their age peers (Rosow, 1967: 35-36).

According to Rosow, the integration of individuals into their society results from forces which place them within the system and govern their participation and patterned associations with others. This network of social bonds has three basic dimensions: social values, group memberships, and social roles. In other words, "people are tied into their society essentially through their beliefs, the groups that they belong to and the positions they occupy or their roles" (Rosow, 1967: 162). In expounding what he terms the integration model of aging Rosow writes:

> The integration theory of aging follows the general premises and major findings of our study. People's self images and identification reflect their actual group memberships. Accordingly, to the extent that integration into groups is related to residential concentration, identification will be similarly correlated with density.

> Presumably, under high density conditions, older neighbors are salient and people are aware of them. This increases their interaction and strong group ties. Density fosters the by-products of group life: consciousness of similiarity, embeddedness in a bounded system; development of special group norms; role specification and restructuring; generation of group supports, including workaday and emergency mutual aid and reciprocity; provision of significant reference figures and viable role models; stimulation of affiliative sentiments, and so on. Thereby, especially for the marginal aged, it creates a type of sheltered structure which insults them from the effects of their marginality and the social insults of old age. It provides an alternative basis of social participation in the wake of their lost roles and waxing external memberships. Such embeddedness ostensibly affects attitudes and fosters identification with one's peers. (Rosow, 1967: 261)

It is in his book, The Social Integration of the Aged, that we find Rosow's most elaborate discussion of the decline of older people's integration into the larger society due to loss of social roles and functions. Most notable, Rosow points out, role loss leads to role ambiguity in old age. Rosow argues effectively that there are no normative prescriptions which develop about this new situation of rolessness. "Role expectations tend to become open, loose, and flexible; there are almost no prescriptions about proper standards and little consensus on appropriate or preferred conduct" (30). The role of the aged in the larger society, according to Rosow, is largely undefined, unstructured and basically empty. Rosow argues that the most viable opportunities for re-integration of the elderly into the larger society is through informal groups and their participation in informal groups among their age peers. As Rosow (1961) points out:

> ... major social gains may be realized from new group memberships. The concentrations of people with common status and problems and with similar life experience and perspectives maximizes the opportunity for new friendships, re-marriage, and furthermore new group memberships afford new identifications and psychological supports as well as mutual aid. The re-integration of the older people into new groups may facilitate their transition to a new aged role. Age peers provide role models on which a person may pattern himself. The older group may also generate

> new age appropriate activities which crystallize new role dimensions. By clarifying expectations and appropriate behavior, especially in dealing with the leisure of retirement, old people provide each other with new norms. In legitimating these norms, age peers may aid the acceptance of older self-conceptions and hedge this in with supports which are presently lacking. If the older people accept their age peers as a new reference group, as a standard for themselves, then their chances of developing clear, acceptable new roles may improve... (88-90)

Rosow thus emphasized the importance of role models and appropriate normative prescriptions for integration of the elderly. His main thesis in his works is that age-concentrated environments provide both of these necessary elements and thus are the vehicles through which elderly achieve integration into a social group or social groups.

Several other social theorists have speculated on the advantages of age-segregated communities in easing the transition to old age and retirement. As Sequin (1973) concluded after her study of one retirement community: "it appears that the retirement community, a relatively recent social invention, can provide the social structure within which an older person can create positions, enact roles, and establish norms that support socialization to old age" (p. 208). Another student of retirement communities similarly noted that "these communities give residents an opportunity to re-enact preretirement roles in a play city. They provide a place where one can gain recognition for leisure activities and status for unique talents that would not be valued on the outside" (Johnson, 1970 p. 144).

Bultena and Wood (1969) and Ross (1975), after conducting studies in age-segregated retirement communities, found that the abundance of role models and new roles available to retirees in such places facilitated adult socialization to the role of retiree. Their conclusions are commensurate with the argument of Eisenstadt (1956) and Messer (1965) that the individual's adaptation to a new set of role behaviors may be eased by his involvement in social systems in

which many others are undergoing similar role transitions. Messer further argues that such communities provide a normative system that is more age-appropriate. And Arnold Rose (1965) suggests that such communities facilitate the development of an "aged subculture."

RESEARCH SETTINGS

The present study, conducted in three age-segregated communities, is a test of Rosow's social integration theory of aging. The three communities were chosen from a large sample of 150 communities in California, Arizona, and Florida. Based upon information collected regarding size, year established, type of dwelling unit, sponsorship, and characteristics of residents the three communities were chosen as being the most representative of the kinds of age-segregated communities our nation's elderly move into.

Hidden Valley, a retirement community of approximately 6000, established in 1964, is nestled in the warm Santa Cruz River Valley 25 miles south of Tucson, Arizona. The community lies in the heart of the Sonoran desert halfway between Tucson and the Mexican border. Surrounded by the towering Santa Rita Mountains, the planned community, with palm-lined streets fronting fancy homes all done in early Spanish architecture, boasts the best year round climate in the nation. Hidden Valley is a completely self-sufficient community with a variety of living arrangements ranging from small apartments or mobile homes to large ranchettes of one to five acres, eight churches, three banks, a six-million dollar shopping center, two large recreation centers, two golf courses and a large country club, several swimming pools and shuffle-board courts scattered throughout. The majority of residents of Hidden Valley are retired white upper middle-class professionals from the Midwest and East. Approximately 80% are married and 95% have college degrees

and were engaged in professional jobs during most of their adult lives. Many were very mobile geographically and in their careers. Many had lived in suburbs for a large part of their adult lives. The average retirement income for most ranged from $10,000 - $12,000.

Ridgeview Mobile Home Community is a County subdivision in Florida, located just eight miles south of Stuart, Florida on the "Gold Coast" near the famed cities of Hobe Sound and Jupiter. Established fourteen years ago, Ridgeview is a fairly small mobile home community. Located off of US Highway #1 on 200 plus acres of land, Ridgeview sits on a high ridge that slopes down from a height of 30 feet which, in the Southeast of Florida, is like the Swiss Alps. Although comprised of only 720 mobile homes, Ridgeview is the largest mobile home park on U. S. Rt. #1 and one of the few in which residents buy their home and lot. Mobile homes range from very old, very small models in the oldest sections of the park to very new double wides in the newer sections. There is only one road in and out of Ridgeview, almost eliminating through traffic. Driving through the beautiful streets, named after various species of local birds, one is impressed by the quiet, lack of congestion and noise, beautiful homes and well kept lawns as well as the outdoor smells of barbecue grills, and the late afternoon bikers. There is a centrally located recreation facility complete with meeting room, classrooms, heated pool and shuffleboard courts which serves as the central meeting place where residents meet to decide local isues, to make new friends or socialize with old ones, to engage in the favorite hobbies or leisure activities. The 1,132 residents who live in Ridgeview form a very homogeneous group. They are all white, nearly all are married (85%) and the majority come from nonprofessional blue-collar occupational backgrounds. The residents were, for the most part, factory workers or employees of large companies who had spent most of their adult

lives in the same dull, routine jobs. Most formerly lived in the northeast. Before retiring most had lived in the same home and community for 20 or 30 years. Many residents held fairly conservative views fearing "big government," condemning "white trash" and members of other ethnic groups.

Jamaica Club, the third setting studied, is a 972-unit condominium located on 60 acres in Tamarac, Florida, one of Florida's newest municipalities. Tamarac is located in Broward County, the fastest growing county in Florida. Jamaica Club is two miles west of the Florida Turnpike, and the main entrance is from Commercial Boulevard, a rather developed strip lined with condominiums and shops. Upon entering Jamaica Club the first impression is one of having arrived at a country club. A rather large, green velvety lawn greets the newcomer. The Clubhouse is beautifully decorated with chandeliers and paintings. Classrooms, meeting rooms, a lounge, an auditorium seating 750, and a library are found in the Clubhouse.

Jamaica Club is a complex of 27 three-story buildings with 36 apartments in each building. In addition to the Clubhouse pool, there are three other pools in the complex for resident use.

Residents of Jamaica Club are a unique group. 99% are Jewish and most come from the East, many from New York City. Many were formerly self-employed businessmen or professionals. Most were college educated and had enjoyed ballet, the opera, the theatre, and various other cultural activities found in their urban environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

The primary methodology employed in this study was the community study methodology. Anthropologists have constantly used the community study as a standard technqiue of field research. These researchers have often studied

primitive tribes or unknown societies, and their work has produced a rich source of detailed descriptive data on such societies. The focus in the community study is always on the community as the unit of analysis. The community study provides a means of studying problems which have a theoretical focus, independent of the particular community studied (Vidich, et. al., 1964:68).

The community study methodology is a field based approach which employs several methods of data collection including: participant observation, interviewing, and document collection.

Maurice Stein (1960) in his book on the subject offers the following definition of the community study method:

> Community study is a synthesis by the author of several orders of data about a particular community arranged according to his sense of significant social structures and processes. Community studies represent ethnographies weaving the scattered strands of a single community into a coherent picture. (4)

Over 25 years ago Arensberg (1954) offered a similar definition in his classic article, "The Community Study Method." Arensberg refers to the community study method as a "naturalistic, comparative method which aims at studying behaviors and attitudes in vivo through observation rather than in vitro through isolation or abstration in a model through experiment."(p.110)

This approach to studying a human system in its natural setting has been used to study a little community, relatively isolated, self-sufficient economically and emotionally (Redfield, 1960); an entire nonliterate society composed of a number of villages, bands, and clans (Malinowshi, 1922) as well a a study of a factory (Gouldner, 1950: 1954), a street corner gang in the

slums of Boston's East End (Whyte, 1959), a family (Handel, 1969) and a medium-sized city in the Midwest (Lynds, 1937), the development of bureaucracy (Warner, 1941) and a variety of other social processes in various settings. For a good account of this methodology the reader is referred to Arensberg (1954), Bell and Newby (1973), Nisbet (1953) and Vidich and Stein (1954).

The researcher or an associate lived in each community for approximately 6 weeks, talking to the residents, on-site staff, and local service providers, observing in various settings, and collecting written documents about the community activities, as well as observing meetings of clubs, organizations, and the Homeowner's Associations, the local units of self government in the communities.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 40 or 50 residents at each site, soliciting information regarding their background, reasons for coming to the community, kind and level of involvement in formal and informal groups and activities, satisfactions and dissatisfactions with life in retirement. In addition, approximately 25 local service providers and on-site staff members were interviewed at each site.

FINDINGS

In-depth case studies of the three communities revealed that each was a tightly integrated, close-knit community in which members were in constant contact, not only geographically, but also in several informal and formal role relations, groups, and activities. Residents shared in the governance of their communities, as well as in the problems and conflicts of day-to-day life

in close physical proximity. In each community various forms of social organization and social control, which served to integrate residents, emerged. Residents identified strongly with their communities in a psychological sense, claiming life in such places was like living "in one big family." "We are all in the same boat here," and "it's like being on Main Street all over again," were the kinds of phrases used by residents to describe the quality of their life in these communities.

Members of each community shared similar values. They valued health, sociability, leisure, and being a good neighbor and good community member. There was in each community a notable lack of emphasis on values such as work, success, money, and material possessions, which are valued in the larger society.

In Hidden Valley residents eat in one of the six local restaurants, shop in the local shops, attend one of the eight churces on site, and engage in a variety of classes and activities in the centrally located recreation hall. They swim together, golf together, and play tennis together in the recreation facilities. Each year they plan and host their County Fair to raise money for the community. Crafts and foods of all sorts are proudly sold by residents. Through the Homeowner's Association, comprised of elected leaders from each local Property Association, the members govern their daily lives. These associations represent the social control agents in Hidden Valley; and residents have actually been "evicted" from the community for failure to comply with established group values. Residents in Hidden Valley have found new roles as community leaders in the recreation association, the Homeowner's Association, or as instructors in various classes or organizers of the Singles Club or one of the active State Clubs on site. Many have made friends on the golf course or in one of the many special interest classes in ceramics,

painting, desert wildlife or other areas. Some have found friends in the church or State Clubs or Singles Club on site.

In Ridgeview members also govern their own lives through their Homeowner's Association. Their annual Christmas party is the big community-wide event, but residents have also added on to the centrally-located club house, planted trees to decrease the noise from the nearby railroad, and built a swimming pool and planted flowers as community projects.

Like residents in Hidden Valley, Ridgeview residents participate in a variety of formal and informal activities together, Bingo and the Saturday night BYOB parties being two of the most popular. They have an active Singles Group and State Clubs, where residents share pot luck suppers, conversation, and fun outings! Elected community leaders find leadership roles in community government and organizations. Friends are made in late afternoon as residents bike together or take a dip in their pool or just talk or share a barbecue or lemonade with neighbors.

In Jamaica Club, residents have formed a Management Council which handles all maintenance, recreation, and governance of the community through an elaborate committee system of assigned tasks and duties.

Residents publish their own newspaper, maintain a well-stocked library, and keep their condos and pool painted and repaired as a volunteer community effort. Classes and activities of all sorts engage the residents and provide a forum for friendship and conversation. The common background of being Jewish is reinforced in Yiddish classes and the synagogue, which all community members attend.

Results from the present study of life in three age-segregated communities confirm Rosow's theory of social integration. Residents of all three communities are integrated through shared common values, group

involvements, and social roles performed. Such communities provide increased opportunities for friendship formation and remarriage, as well as offering residents a variety of age-appropriate roles, groups, activities, and norms.

Because communities studied differed on most major variables such as location, size, resident composition (white collar, blue collar, Jewish) and type of dwelling unit, yet were all highly integrated, we may conclude that age per se formed the basis of integration for residents.

Members from the same cohort share a common past (wars, depression, etc.) and are at the same stage in the life cycle,(retired, children raised and out on their own, widowhood possibly). Living amongst age peers reinforces the common set of values and similar interests shared by those in the same stage of the life cycle. Such communities also provide a ready made source of friends and partners, as well as many roles, groups, and activities which are appropriate for older individuals and not necessarily available in the larger society. Most succinctly stated by Hochschild (1973), who studied life of widows in Merrill Court, (an age-segregated mobile home community) in the conclusion of her book, Unexpected Community:

> Solidarity can renew the social contact the old have with life. For old roles that are gone, new ones are available. If the world watches them less for being old, they watch one another more. Lacking responsibilities to the young, the old take on responsibilities toward one another. Moreover, in a society that raises an eyebrow at those who do not act their age, the sub-culture encourages the old to dance, to sing, to flirt, and to joke. They talk frankly about death in a way less common between the old and young. They show one another how to be, and trade solutions to problems they have not faced before. (141)

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